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Testimony on SB 415: An Act Establishing Additional School-Based Health Centers  
Public Health Committee  
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Submitted by: Stephen Karp, MSW

The National Association of Social Workers, CT chapter supports SB 415. NASW/CT is a longtime supporter of expansion of school based health centers.

According to the National Mental Health Association, less than 1 in 5 of the 12.5 million children in need of mental health services actually receive them. Many of these children will not achieve academic success due to social, emotional and behavioral problems affecting school performance. SBHC's can help these students through means of prevention, early identification, intervention, counseling and support. Especially in both urban and rural communities where many families do not have access to affordable mental health care it is the SBHC's clinical social worker or other mental health provider that meets the child's mental health needs.

For many students the SBHC is the only health and mental health service available to them. SBHC's offer mental health treatment, address acute conditions, provide preventive medical exams, treat injuries, offer oral health care, provide follow-up on chronic conditions and offer health education. These are services that benefit the student, the student's family, and the school system by having a healthier student body.

It is important in setting up new SBHCs that both physical and mental health services are offered. This comprehensive approach of treating both the body and mind makes for the most effective treatment model. It is our understanding that the SBHCs listed in this bill will indeed utilize this complete approach to care.

Schools do not function in a vacuum. When students cross that school door they bring with them the life stresses of their family, impacts of poverty, trauma of witnessing violence, fears of being bullied, chronic and acute health problems, and in this poor economy where so many families are struggling to get by all of the concerns that a poor economy places on a family press on the student's mind. All of these factors are obstacles to learning. All of these obstacles are brought into the classroom. The medical and behavioral staff of SBHC's breaks through these barriers by providing students with a safe place to seek care within the school. This in turn allows students to return to the classroom ready to be productive in their educational learning.

School based health clinics support student health and student learning. We strongly recommend passage of SB 415.